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Annie V. Wright

Los Angeles.

1909.

See page 75

I JUST SAY TO MYSELF HE UNDERSTANDS [illegible] BUSINESS

Where the Laborers are Few

BY

MARGARET DELAND

AUTHOR OF

"THE AWAKENING OF HELENA RICHIE"

"OLD CHESTER TALES" ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

ALICE BARBER STEPHENS

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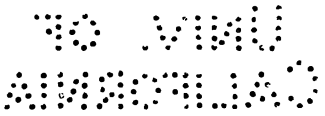

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Illustrations

"I JUST SAY TO MYSELF, 'HE UNDERSTANDS HIS BUSINESS'" . *Frontispiece*

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Where the Laborers Are Few

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Where the Laborers Are Few

I

MISS JANE JAY used to think that she discovered Paul Phillips; but really and truly Doctor Lavendar saw him before she did, and so did her sister, Miss Henrietta.

It was one hot August afternoon that the old minister, passing the open door of Van Horn's tavern, saw a lazy, sweltering crowd gathered inside, where, it seemed, some sort of entertainment was going on. Doctor Lavendar stopped and looked in, his

hands on either side of the doorway, his hat pushed back, his face red with heat. He smiled, and blinked his kind old eyes, and then he frowned: an acrobat, in black tights and scarlet breech-cloth, was vaulting over chair backs and making high kicks. His work was done with remarkable grace, but with exertions which it was painful to witness, for he had but one leg, and had to use a crutch. Still, his face, which was dark and very handsome and streaming with perspiration, was sparkling with interest and enjoyment.

It was the one leg that offended Doctor Lavendar. "Trading on his infirmities," he said to himself, frowning, and shook his head. Van Horn, in his shirt-sleeves, with a palm-leaf fan, trying to keep cool in a big rocking-chair, shook his head too, as if to say

that he didn't approve, but what could he do? Then he turned his eyes back to the man, who, with astonishing ease, spun round on his crutch and kicked lightly up into the air so far above his own head that he dislodged a hat balanced on top of the clock. There was a round of applause, and the acrobat, panting and leaning on his crutch, bowed and laughed and showed his handsome white teeth. Doctor Lavendar snorted under his breath, and opening his umbrella, went back into the sun and heat, and plodded along toward home. He stopped once to speak to Miss Henrietta Jay, who was coming down the street, her square, wilted countenance full of agitation and dismay.

"Oh, Doctor Lavendar!" she said, with a gasp, "have you seen—*have* you seen a large white cat anywhere about?"

Where the Laborers Are Few

Poor old Miss Henrietta's voice shook as she spoke. She had no umbrella, and the sun beat down on her bent shoulders. She wore a faded black dolman which had a sparse fringe of narrow crinkled tapes. Her rusty bonnet was very much on one side, as though the green velvet rosette over her left eye weighed it down. "It's our Jacky," she said, her lip shaking. "He's lived with us fifteen years; and he's lost."

"Oh, lost cats always find their way home," Doctor Lavendar said, comfortingly.

"Do you think so?" she said, in a despairing voice. But she did not wait for his answer; she went on down the street, with wavering uncertain steps, as though feeling always that she might be going in just the wrong direction. She stopped now and then

at a gateway or an alley, and called softly, "Baby! baby!" but no white cat appeared. It was then that she too passed the tavern door and looked in, but only to say to Van Horn, "Have you seen a large white cat anywhere?" Afterward she remembered that she had seen the acrobat; but at the moment she was blind to everything but her own anxiety.

Doctor Lavendar looked after her and sighed; but when he met Willy King coming out of Tommy Dove's shop, and smelling of dried herbs, he burst out with his disapproval of the performance in the bar-room. "There's a man down there at the tavern," he said, "jumping around on one leg to get coppers. I wonder Van Horn allows it!"

And Willy agreed, gloomily: William was very gloomy just then, because

his wife, very sensibly, was dieting him to reduce his weight. "That kind of beggary is blackmail," he said. "It makes an appeal to your sympathies, and you give, in spite of common sense. At least, you want to give; but I won't. It's the same thing with these women who knit afghans and things, that you can't use! Your mountebank at the tavern ought to be in the workhouse."

"As for knitting," said Doctor Lavendar, thoughtfully, "I suppose you mean the Jay girls? Well, poor things! they've got to do something that's genteel; and knitting is that, you know. Maggy refers to it always as 'fancy-work,' which soothes her pride, poor girl."

"Maggy is a goose," said the Doctor, irritably, "and yet she is the only one that has any sense in the whole family!"

"Willy," said Doctor Lavendar, chuckling, "you've bought an afghan! —or maybe baby socks?" The Doctor looked sheepish. "William, you always remind me of the young man in the Bible who said he would not, and then straightway did. Well, I'm glad you did, my boy; they are almost destitute, poor girls!—almost destitute, I fear."

As for Willy King, he went down to the tavern with disapproval on his lips, but with a quarter in his hand. "I'll have to put something into his hat, I suppose, but I'll tell Van Horn what I think of this kind of thing," he said to himself, sternly. But when he looked into the bar-room the crowd had dispersed and the man had gone.

"Well, Willy," said Van Horn, who had known the Doctor when he was a boy and used to steal apples from the tavern orchard, "I swan, that was the

queerest fish! He hadn't only but one leg and a crutch, and he kicked as high as your head, sir. Yes, sir, as high as your head. And then, I swan, when the show was over, if he didn't turn to and preach to them there fellers; preach as good a sermon—well, now you won't believe me, but it was a first-class sermon! Well, sir, them fellers listened. Tob Todd listened. Yes he did. He listened. And that man he told 'em not to patronize my bar, so he did. Well, for the soakers, I hold up both hands to that! But to see a one-legged dancing tramp setting up to preach in a bar-room—I swan!" said Van Horn, who could find no words for the occasion.

The Doctor looked disgusted, and put his quarter back in his pocket. "You'd better keep your eye on the till," he said, briefly.

But Van Horn was doubtful. "Seemed like as if he was all right," he ruminated; "still, you can't never tell."

So it happened that Willy King had his views about Paul when Miss Jane Jay came, white and breathless, to tell him that the poor man had "hurt his limb" on the road near her sister's house, and would he please come and fix it? "At once, Doctor King," said Jane, agitatedly, "at once!"

Miss Jane was the youngest of the Miss Jays. There were three Misses Jay, who lived "the Lord knows how!" Old Chester used to say, in their tumbled-down old house on the river road. Doctor Lavendar sometimes referred to their circumstances as "straitened," but he had no idea of the degree of their straitness. Nobody knew that

but the Jay girls, and they kept it to themselves. The family had known better days two generations back; indeed, many a time, when their dinner was inadequate, the Misses Jay stayed their stomachs on the fact that they were Bishop Jay's great-granddaughters. Besides that, their father had been a clergyman; so they had, poor ladies! in the midst of their poverty, that gentle condescension which is the ecclesiastical form of Christian humility. They took a great interest in church matters, and they were critical of sermons, as behooved those who knew the dark mysteries of sermon-writing. Still, they were kindly, simple women, who tried, on a very insufficient income, to do their duty and live up to their clerical past. This family pride was most noticeable in fat Miss Maggy—there are people who

would be fat on a straw a day! Henrietta, the oldest, devoted to her cat and her canary-bird, and the real genius of the family in regard to afghans, read her Bible through twice a year on a system arranged by the bishop, and merely echoed Maggy's views; little Jane admitted the dignity of her birth whenever Maggy called her attention to it, but she murmured sometimes a vague protest at its restrictions. Indeed, she and Henrietta, without Maggy's influence, might even have slipped down into what Miss Maggy called "mercantile pursuits." They would have been dressmakers, perhaps, for Henrietta had a pretty taste in turning dresses wrong side out, right side out, and wrong side out again; and Jane might have trimmed bonnets with (she used to think to herself) a "real touch." But Miss

Maggy was firm. "I am sure," she said, "I have the greatest respect for working persons. Great-grandfather Jay wrote a tract for them—don't you remember?—'The Virtuous Content of Poor James, the Brickmaker.' But still, I know what is due to our station. And besides," she ended, with that pathetic shrinking of elderly, genteel poverty, "if you trimmed hats, Jane, everybody would know that we are—are not well off." The other sisters sighed, and agreed, and were somehow oblivious of the fact that Willy King had no need of a dozen pairs of baby socks, and that Mrs. Dale's order of an afghan every year implied either that these brilliant coverings wore out very quickly, or else that Mrs. Dale's purchase was only—but it would be cruel to name it!

"We do fancy-work," Miss Maggy

said, "for recreation; if our friends need the product of our needles, well and good. Were our circumstances different, we would be glad to give them what they wish. As it is, we make a slight charge—for materials."

So the Misses Jay knitted and crocheted; and one day in the year put on their shabby best clothes and made calls; and one day in the year entertained the sewing society, and lived on the fragments of cake afterward as long as they lasted. It was a harmless, monotonous life, its only interest the anxiety about money—which is not an interest that feeds the soul.

On this hot August afternoon—the afternoon following, as it chanced, the meeting of the sewing society, the Misses Jays' ancient cat, disturbed, perhaps, by the excitement of so much company, had disappeared. Henrietta

had hurried into the village to look for him, and Jane had gone out in the other direction; Maggy stayed at home to let him in if he came back. But Jane did not go far; not that she was not anxious about Jacky, only "there's no use getting a sunstroke," she said to herself, wearily. However, she did look, and called among the bushes, and then, feeling the heat very much, in a hopeless way she gave it up.

There is a wooden bridge across a shallow run just beyond the Jay house, and Jane thought how cool it would be in the deep shadow under the dusty planks, where the run slipped smoothly over wide flat stones, or chattered into little waterfalls a foot high; and perhaps Jacky might be down there, she thought. So, holding on to the bushes and tufts of grass, she climbed down

the bank and found this dark shelter, with the cool sound of running water. "Jacky! Come kitty!" she called once or twice; and then she sat down on a water-worn log washed up under the bridge and caught between two stones; there were tufts of dried dead grass here and there, swept sidewise by the winter torrents and left now above the shrunken summer stream, bleached and stiff with yellow mud; overhead were the planks of the bridge, with lines of sunshine between them as thin as knitting-needles. Once, as she sat there, a wagon came jolting along, and the dust sifted down and spread in a flowing scum on the water. It was very silent, except for the run, chattering and bubbling and chattering again; sometimes, absently, she picked up little stones and threw them into the water: she was thinking of an

afghan she was making for Rachel King's little adopted baby. But Miss Jane had no interest in her work; it was something to be done, that was all. Indeed, she was tired of the touch of the worsted, and of the hot smoothness of the crochet-needle, slipping in and out, in and out. She dabbled her fingers in the water, as if she would wash the feeling away. She thought vaguely of the years of afghans and socks and endless talk about colors; there was never anything more exciting to talk about than whether pink and blue stripes would be pretty together, or whether it would be safe to try the new fashion of using green and blue in the same piece. Miss Maggy declared it would be shocking! "I don't believe Mrs. Dale would approve of a green and blue afghan," Miss Maggy would say,

emphatically; "I am sure she would think it almost—*French!*" No; there was nothing more interesting than the choice of colors, except the sewing society meeting once a year; or, now, Jacky's getting lost. In all the level dulness of Miss Jane's thirty-four years, there had been nothing important—not even a grief!

As she sat there listening to the low chatter and whisper of the run, there came to little Miss Jane a bad query—"*What is the use of it all?*" I suppose most of us know the peculiar *ennui* of the soul that accompanies this question; it is a sort of spiritual nausea which is never felt in the stress of agonized living, but only in sterile peace; indeed, that is why we may believe it to be but the demand of Life for living—for love, or hate, or pain. Miss Jane, thinking dully of

afghans, made no such analysis; she was not happy enough to know that she was unhappy. She only said to herself: "I wonder what's the matter with me? I guess it's Henrietta's cake."

She sighed, and dropped her chin into her hand, leaning her elbow on her knee. Her face was thin, but it had a delicate color, and her eyes were violet, or blue, or gray, like changing clouds; her pathetic mouth, drooping and patiently discontented, had much sweetness in its timid way. But there was no touch of human passion about her. She was fond of her sisters, she told herself, as she sat there wondering what was the use of it all, but nothing stirred in her at the thought of them. "If somebody told me just now, here under the bridge, that something had happened to sister

Maggy, I don't believe I'd really mind. Of course I'd cry, and all that—but it wouldn't make any difference. I just *don't care*. And I don't care whether Jacky comes back or not."

And as she spoke she lifted her head and listened. Some one was coming down the road whistling. When he reached the bridge there was a curious sound: a footstep, then a tap; a footstep, then a tap. The dust jolted softly down, wavering across the strips of sunshine, and then vanishing on the flowing water. "It's a lame person," said Miss Jane, listening. A footstep, then a tap—then a snap, a crash, a fall! Jane jumped up, breathlessly; from a knot-hole in the planks above her a broken stick fell clattering on to the stones; it had a brass ferrule and ring. "Some poor man has broken his crutch,"

Jane thought. "Wait a minute, and I'll bring it up to you!" she called out, and began to climb up the bank, the end of the crutch in her hand.

As for Paul Phillips, when he pitched forward into the dust, he was so astonished that for the moment he did not feel the keen twinge a wrenched knee. But when Miss Jane, out of breath, with the end of the crutch in her hand, appeared over the edge of the bank, his face was white with pain.

"Oh, you've hurt yourself!" said Miss Jane.

"Yes, 'm," said Paul; "but never mind!" His brown eyes smiled up at her in the kindest way.

"Oh, you are—lame," she faltered.

"Yes; but that's nothing," Paul said, the color beginning to come back into his face; "I guess I put the end of my crutch into that knot-hole. I

was whistling away, you know, and I never took notice of the road."

"I heard you whistling," said Miss Jane; "but—what are you going to do?"

"Oh, somebody 'll come along and give me a lift," he said; then he looked ruefully at the parted strap of his knapsack, which had burst open, scattering his possessions in the dust.

"You can't stay here in the sun," she protested, "and so few wagons come along this road."

"If I could get over there to the other side," he said, "there's a good lot of shade, and I could just sit there until a cart comes along. I'll get 'em to drop me at one of these barns. I'll get a night's lodging in the hay, and my knee 'll be all right to-morrow." He tried to scramble up, but the effort made him blanch with pain.

"Oh, do let me help you," said Miss Jane, her color coming and going. "Oh dear, I know it must hurt! Do put your hand on my shoulder; do, please!" Paul assented very simply; with a gentle, iron-like grip he took hold of her thin little arm; but it was so little and so tremulous that he let go almost instantly, and would have had an awkward fall but that she caught him; then he got his balance, and leaning on her shoulder, sweating and smiling at the pain, he managed to get to the other end of the bridge.

Miss Jane, standing beside him, in her striped barege dress, her hat with its flounce of lace around the brim pushed back from her flushed and interested face, began to protest that she must get some help immediately! But even as she spoke Paul suddenly

HE MANAGED TO GET TO THE OTHER END OF THE BRIDGE

turned his head a little and fainted quite away.

So that was how it happened that (a man and cart coming along most opportunely) he was not carried to a barn to nurse his sprained knee, but to the Jay girls' house, where he was put down on the big horse-hair sofa in the parlor, and given over to the ministration of Willy King.

II

WILLIAM KING was not sympathetic. He said the man had hurt his knee badly, and had better be sent to the workhouse to recover. "He ought to be in jail," Willy said to Miss Maggy, who lifted her hands in horror at the word. "He's a vagrant. I'll send some kind of conveyance, and have him taken to the workhouse. It's too bad you should be bothered with him, Miss Maggy."

Then it was that Jane, standing behind her sister, and quite hidden by her ponderous frame, said, in her light, fluttering voice: "Poor man! I think

it would be wicked to send him to the workhouse."

Doctor King shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, of course it is just as you and Miss Maggy say. You'll be very kind to keep him for a few days; but I hope you'll not be repaid by having your spoons carried off."

Miss Maggy's mouth grew round with dismay. "But ladies in our position cannot refuse shelter to a poor man with an injured limb," she said.

"And his only limb, too!" Jane added, excitedly.

As for the danger to the spoons—"We haven't but six," said Miss Maggy, sighing, "and we can hide them under the edge of the carpet in Henrietta's room. Go and meet her, Janie, and tell her about the poor man."

Henrietta was coming up the road,

her bonnet still very much on one side, and her old face quivering with anxiety. "Did you find him?" she called out as soon as she saw Jane, who shook her head, and began to tell her own exciting story. Miss Henrietta listened, absently.

"His name is Paul," Jane ended; "a very romantic name, I think. You don't mind his remaining, do you, sister Henrietta?"

"No, I don't mind," said Miss Henrietta, sighing. "Is he a circus actor? One of the servants took me to the circus once, when I was a little thing. Janie, ask him if he saw a large white cat as he came along. Poor man! I'm sorry he hurt himself. Oh, Janie, Jacky may be hurt! I keep thinking that he may be suffering," she said, her poor old eyes filling: then, as they came up to the door, she called again,

faintly: "Baby! baby! Come, pussy; come, Jack!"

As for Miss Maggy, when it was settled that the man should remain, she thought of the pantry and sighed; but it was she who informed him that he might stay until his "limb" permitted him to walk.

Paul, however, had his own views. "No, 'm," he said, "thank you; but I see you have a stable back there behind the house; I'll go there, and lie in the hay till my knee clears up. Then I'll go along."

"But you can just as well stay here," Jane said.

Paul shook his head with cheerful stubbornness. "No, ma'am; I'm much obliged to you, but I'll go to the stable."

"As you please, my good man," said Miss Maggy.

But Jane still protested. "Oh, a stable!" she said; "you oughtn't to be in a stable."

"There's been One in a stable, ma'am, that didn't think it beneath Him. I'm right apt to think about that, sleeping round the way I do," the man said, simply.

The two ladies stared at him with parted lips.

"It must have been a pretty sight," he went on, thoughtfully. "When I'm lying up on the hay, I get the picture of it in my mind real often—just like as if I saw it. There's the cows standing round chewing their cud; and maybe some mules—you'd hear them stamping. And the oxen would be rubbing up against their stanchions. I always think the door was open a little crack, and you could see out—the morning just beginning, you know.

And there, in the manger, Mary and Him. I like to think that to myself —don't you?"

"Why—yes; I don't know—I suppose so," Jane said, breathlessly.

"My great-grandfather wrote a sermon on the Nativity," Miss Maggy said, kindly; "I'm sure he would think it very nice in you to have such thoughts."

But after that they did not oppose his plan of leaving the house. The butcher-boy was asked to help him limp out to the stable, and some hay was shaken down for his bed.

"He talks like a Sunday-school teacher," the boy said, when he came back for the five-cent fee that had been promised him; "but *I* don't mind. And you'd ought to 'a' seen him jump—down at the tavern! My!"

And indeed, with open pride, the

acrobat himself bore testimony to his ability. "I get a good living out of this leg," he said, "and I don't know what I should do if it was to stiffen up on me." He sighed and looked anxiously at William King, who had stopped at the barn door to ask how he was getting along.

"If you keep quiet, you'll come out all right," Willy said, gruffly; "but if I were you, I'd try to find a more decent way of earning my living."

Paul laughed. "It's decent enough," he said, "so long as I'm decent. That's the way I look at work:—your trade's decent, so long as you are. It isn't being decent troubles me—though I will say I don't like to hand round the hat. Not but what I've a right to! I do good work; yes, first-class work. There ain't a man in my class with two legs, let alone one, that can touch

the notch I do. No, sir! I'm proud of my profession. But the trouble is—"

"Well, what's the trouble?" the Doctor said.

"Why, it's so uncertain," the man explained. "I have got as high as $1.75 at a performance; and then, again, I won't get but twenty-five cents. But if this darned knee was to stiffen up on me—"

"It won't," William King said; "but I should think you could do something better than this, anyhow."

Paul looked perfectly uncomprehending. "But I'm A1," he insisted. "Before my accident I was 'way up in the profession. You don't seem to understand:—I was a star! Of course it is a come-down to travel and hand round the hat; but I'm mighty lucky I've got a one-legged profession, as

you might call it, to fall back on, to support my little sister; she's an invalid. And then, I do get good opportunities," he added.

"Opportunities to perform?"

"No, I didn't mean that," the man answered, briefly.

"What was your accident?" said Willy King. He had come in, and was sitting on a wheelbarrow; Paul was stretched in the hay in front of him. Except for the square of sunshine just within the wide doorway, the crumbling, shadowy old barn was cool and still, but outside the yellow September landscape blazed and shimmered in the heat. The barn was deserted, for the cow was out at pasture; now and then a hen walked in at the open door, and pecked about in a vain search for oats; on the dusky rafters overhead some pigeons balanced and

cooed, and from a cobweb-covered window a dim stream of sunshine poured down on the man lying in the hay. Willy King took off his hat and clasped his hands around one fat knee. "How did you hurt yourself?" he said.

"Trapeze. That was my line. Well, it wasn't just an accident. There was a rope cut half through—"

"What! You don't mean on purpose?"

"Well, yes," the man said, easily. "I guess there was no doubt of it. Well, I was up there right by the main pole— My, that's a sight! I suppose you never was up by the main pole in the circus, during a performance?"

"Well, no," the Doctor admitted.

"Yes, it's a great sight. You sit up there on the trapeze, and look down at all the rows and rows of faces, and

you can't hear anything but a kind of hum, you're up so high—right up under the canvas; you can hear it, though, flapping and booming, cracking like a whip once in a while! Half of it may be in the sun, and then a big shadow on half of it; and all the people looking up at you, and the band squeaking away down below for your money's worth! Yes, it's a sight. Well, that's all there was to it. I saw the rope giving, and I jumped to catch a flyer; and I missed it. But I wasn't killed. Well, it was wonderful—I wasn't killed!" He smiled as he spoke, but there was a brooding gravity in his face.

When Willy King left his patient, he stopped at the Jay house to say that Paul was getting along very well; he must have said something else, too, for when he went home he presented

his wife with a sofa pillow. "Now, Willy," said poor Mrs. William, "this is the sixth! Indeed, I do think it is wrong in you to encourage the Jay girls to make things nobody needs. I think it would be a truer kindness to tell them, flatly and frankly, that you would give them the money outright if they wanted you to, but you *would not* buy things you didn't want!"

"It would hurt their feelings," the Doctor objected.

"My dear, truth is more important than feelings," said Martha.

William changed the subject hurriedly. William was blond, and fat, and very amiable, and he had a great respect for his Martha's common sense. But common sense palls on a husband sometimes.

III

PAUL improved very slowly; the fact was, the barn was comfortable and the perfect cure of the knee important, so with simple confidence in the hospitality of the three ladies, he gave himself up to the pleasure of convalescence. And it was certainly pleasant. The Misses Jay were very kind to him. Miss Henrietta visited him every morning, bringing his breakfast, and telling him many times how, when she was a little girl, she had been taken by a servant to the circus. "Persons of that class," said Miss Henrietta, "care for such entertain-

ments, you know. Well, I saw a young lady ride on a horse without any saddle! It was really wonderful. I've never forgotten it." And then, after this politely personal reminiscence, she would talk to him about her poor pussy, whose affection and intelligence gradually assumed abnormal proportions. Sometimes, as she carried his plate away, she would stop and call feebly, "Jacky, Jacky!—You know he might be lying sick under the barn," she explained to Paul, who was very sympathetic. Miss Maggy went every day before dinner to inquire for his "limb." As for Miss Jane, she came to the barn door upon any excuse. Into the starved, thin life of little Miss Jane had come suddenly an interest. Perhaps that reference to the stable in Bethlehem had first given her something to think about. It had been

startlingly incongruous, but there had been nothing offensive in it, because it was so simple; indeed, that it was the natural tenor of the man's thought was obvious at once. The first morning, when Miss Henrietta took his breakfast out to him, she found him reading his Bible. The next day Miss Maggy, hunting for eggs in the shed, heard some one singing, and listening, caught the words:

"Guide me, O thou Great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak—"

Then there was a pause. Then a joyous burst: "yes; 'but Thou art mighty' —(I bet Thou art!)." And then the rest of it:

"Lead me with Thy powerful hand!"

Miss Maggy, who had the unreasoning emotion of the fat, repeated this

with tears to her sisters, and added that perhaps it might help the poor man in his effort to be a Christian to give him one of Great-grandfather Jay's sermons to read. Miss Henrietta agreed vaguely, and then said she knew that he was a good-hearted person, because he had sympathized so about Jacky. But Miss Jane, crocheting rapidly, thought to herself how strange it was that a man who had been a circus rider should be—religious! The fact caught her interest, just as sometimes a point in a wide, dull landscape catches the eye—perhaps the far-off window of some unseen house flaring suddenly with the sun and speaking a hundred mysteries of invisible human living. The commonplace, healthy way in which, once or twice, Paul spoke of those things which, being so vital, are hidden by

most of us, was a shock to her which was awakening. It was like letting hot sunshine and vigorous wind touch suddenly some delicate, spindling plants which have grown always in the dark. But it attracted her with the curious fascination which the unusual, even if it is a little painful, has for all of us. So she went very often to the barn to inquire about his health. Sometimes she took her knitting and sat on the barn door-step, and tried, in a fluttering way, to make him talk. This was not difficult; the acrobat was most cheerfully talkative. Propped up in the hay, he watched her, and sometimes held her big, loose ball of double zephyr in his hands, unrolling a length or two in answer to her soft jerk. He told her about his "business" and the difficulties of his "profession," and once in a while, very simply, there

would come some allusion to deeper things. But for the most part he talked about being "on the road." He blushed all over his dark, handsome face when he said that he had to hand round the hat after a performance. "But it's for sister Alice," he explained. He had a good deal to say about this sister. She lived out in Iowa, he said, and he didn't believe he'd ever take another long tramp as far east as Pennsylvania. "It's too far away. Alice is kind of sickly, and if she was to be taken bad, I might not be able to get back in a hurry. I mightn't have my car-fare. I'm going to tramp it home in October, and then I guess I'll dwell among mine own people, as David says." One day he showed her a little dog-eared account-book in which he kept the record of his receipts and expenditures. "In a town,

I've got to put up at a tavern overnight, and that counts up. That's why I like to go to little places where there are barns. Now there's Mercer on that page: I had to pay for a license in Mercer; and the barkeepers, they charge too; so I only made $1 the first day, and 75 cents the next, and $1.20 the last day. You'd 'a' thought I'd done better in a city, wouldn't you? On that page opposite is my expenses. See? At the bottom of the page is what I sent Alice—$3.25 that week. I sent her as high as $5 once."

It was raining, and Jane was sitting just inside the door; she ran her hand along her wooden knitting-needles, and then took the account-book, holding it nervously, as though not quite certain what to do with it.

"I made most of that $5," said Paul,

"in a saloon that was run by a man by the name of Bloder."

"I shouldn't think," Miss Jane said, hesitatingly, "that it would be pleasant to—to perform in saloons? I suppose there are many—unrefined persons in saloons. I am told that gentlemen in such places are sometimes"—she hesitated—"overcome."

"Oh," he said, eagerly, "saloons are just my place! I'd rather go to a saloon than have three open-air turns."

Jane Jay shut the little book and handed it back to him; there was a look of pain about her delicate lips. The acrobat glanced at her, and then his dark eyes brimmed with laughter. "Bless your heart!—it's because them unrefined gentlemen are there, that I go! I get more men in a saloon, don't you see? And when the show's

done, I get a hack at 'em. I believe that when I go into a saloon, dirty, like as not, with old musty sawdust on the floor all dripped over with beer, and a lot of fellows just shaking hands with the devil—I believe I'm preaching to the spirits in prison."

"Why, do you mean," she demanded—"do you mean that you talk—*religion* in those places?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Why, you ought to be a clergyman!" she said, impulsively.

"I wish I could be," he said, with a sigh. "Of course that's what I aimed for; but you see, with Alice to look after—no, I don't suppose I could ever afford it. This is the best I can do—to talk after the performances. But it isn't like having a church with red seats and a pulpit. But my vow was to be a preacher, ma'am."

"And then you decided to be a—to —to give performances?"

"No, ma'am; 'twas like this," he said. "I was doing trapeze business. Well, I was advertised all round; you ought to have seen the bill-boards, and Signor Paulo, in his great act, shooting down with his arms folded—this way—across his breast! That was me. I got good pay those days; and—and I was—well ma'am, I was a great sinner. I was the chief of sinners. Well, I had enemies in my line: a star always has. The greater you are," said the acrobat, with perfect simplicity, "the more folks envy you. So somebody cut a rope half through right up under the canvas. The ropes are tested before every performance, so it must have been a quick job for the fellow that did it. I was sitting up there, and I seen the rope

giving. Well, I don't know; I don't know"—his voice dropped, and he looked past her with rapt, unseeing eyes—"it was a vision, I guess: *I seen my sin.* 'My God!' I said, out loud. I don't know to this day if it was because I was scared of being killed, or scared of my sin. Of course nobody could hear me—the horses tearing round the ring, and mademoiselle jumping through fire-hoops, and the band playing away for dear life. Well—it was jump, anyhow; so I just yelled out, '*You save me, and I'll give You the credit!*' Then I jumped."

"Oh!" said Jane, panting, and knitting very fast.

"Well, that was all there was to it. He saved me. And there was my bargain with Him. At first, seeing that my leg had to go, I wasn't just sure we was even; and then I says to my-

self: 'Yes; He saved me. He only just gave me a pinch in the leg, for fear I'd get too stuck up, starring, and forget my bargain.' I don't know as I would have seen it right off, but a minister came to see me a good deal in the hospital, and he gave me a lot of ideas. He just pointed out that so long as my life was saved, my bargain was good. 'You give God the glory wherever you go,' he said—which is the church way of saying give Him the credit, you know. Well, at first I took it to be that I'd preach, respectably, in a church; I've a good deal of a gift in talking. But it wasn't to be," he ended, with a sigh.

"Why not?" Jane demanded, boldly. In her interest she rolled her work up in her black silk apron, and came and sat down beside him in the hay. Paul turned a little on his side, and leaning

on his elbow, looked up at her, his dark, gentle eyes smiling. She would not have known how to say it, but she felt a dull envy of the passion and emotion that had illuminated his face. She wished he would talk some more about —things. It was as if her numb, chilled mind tried to crouch closer to the warmth of his vital personality. She bent forward as she talked to him, and her breath came quicker. "I don't see why you shouldn't be a clergyman," she said.

"Well, I haven't any education," he explained. "I couldn't stand up in a real church, with nice red cushions, and talk. You see, I don't know things that church people want to hear. I don't understand about election, and foreordination, and those things. You've got to have an education for a church; and an education

costs money. And then there's Alice: I can't stop earning, you see." He lapsed into silence, and Jane was silent too. But she looked at him again sidewise, and the beauty of his large frame—the broad, deep chest, the grace and vigor of the long line from the shoulder to the knee, the powerful arm and wrist—held her eyes.

"My knee's getting on," he said, suddenly; "and I think I can make a start in another week; but before I go I want to have a performance for you and the other two ladies—and any of your lady friends you'd like to invite in. I'll give you the best show I've got," he said, his face eager and handsome, and all alert to return favor with favor, and to reveal the possibilities of his profession.

"Oh, you are very kind," Miss Jane

said, with a start; "I'll tell my sisters. They'll be very much interested, I know; but—but I'd like it better for you just to preach."

"I guess you ladies don't need my kind of preaching," he answered, good-naturedly; "you're 'way up above that, you know. You're all ready to hear about the Trinity, and how much a cubit is, and what a centurion is, and free will—and all those things. If I ever get my education, and know 'em, I'll invite you to come to my church. But now I'll just have to stick to the gospel, I guess."

IV

THOSE were strange days to Miss Jane Jay. Into the even dulness of knitting afghans, and bemoaning Jacky, and wondering whether the weather would be this or that, had come the jar of vigorous living, as vulgar as the honest earth—loud, courageous, full of toil and sweat and motion. Once, walking home in the rainy dusk, she stopped before a deserted cow-shed by the roadside, on which, long ago, had been pasted a circus advertisement. It was torn at one corner, and was flapping idly in the wind. The colors were washed

and faded by summer rains, and some boys had thrown mud at it, but Miss Jane could still see the picture of a man hanging by one arm from a trapeze, ready for the downward dive.

"Mr. Phillips used to do that," she thought. She called him Mr. Phillips, not Paul, as the others did in their familiar and condescending kindness. She was glad he did not do those things now: the preaching lifted him to another plane in her mind.

The other sisters were interested in Paul too, but the atrophy of years cannot be easily vitalized, and they did not think very much about him. Maggy had her grim pantry preoccupations. Henrietta was absorbed in patiently trying to accustom herself to Jacky's loss. She used to sit making baby socks hour after hour, her poor vague fancy picturing the

pussy's wanderings and sufferings, until for very wretchedness the slow, painful tears would rise and blur the crocheting in her wrinkled hands. Still, she listened sympathetically when Jane told her this or that of Mr. Phillips; and both she and Maggy were especially moved when they heard of his desire to preach the gospel.

"I think he'd make a good clergyman—he's kind to animals," said Miss Henrietta, sighing. "I saw him patting Clover the other night. Oh dear, how he would have loved Jacky!"

Miss Maggy nodded approvingly, and said again that it was very nice for a poor person to be religious. "Perhaps I'll copy one of Great-grandfather Jay's sermons for him, and he can take it away with him, and read it aloud after his performances—though perhaps he ought to

have a license for a bishop's sermon," she added, doubtfully. "As for his performing for us"—for Miss Jane had repeated Paul's offer—"I suppose it would seem ungracious not to let him do it."

But when the day came that Paul's knee was strong enough for gymnastics, the two older ladies were really quite interested in his "show," as he called it. "He is going to do it to-night," Miss Maggy said; "and he says that it will be in the finest style! He said he would wear tights. I didn't like to ask him what they were, as it is not, I think, delicate to refer to any special garment of a—a gentleman's wardrobe; but I did wonder."

"It means stays, I suppose," said Miss Henrietta. "I don't see why he mentioned them, I'm sure."

"Oh, well, a person in Paul's walk

of life does not realize the impropriety of such an allusion before ladies," said Miss Maggy, kindly. "You can't expect him to make delicate distinctions. I hope he's not disappointed because we are not asking any one in; but we couldn't do that, we would have to provide refreshments afterwards. Henrietta, would you put a white border on this baby blanket, or a blue one?"

"I think," said Jane, breathing quickly, "that Mr. Phillips is just as delicate as any one."

"I like blue best," Miss Henrietta said.

Jane's hands trembled, and she put her knitting down. "I'm going to ask him if he doesn't want another lamp for to-night. We can let him have two," she said, indifferent to poor Miss Maggy's sigh that it would use up a good deal of oil. She went

ly, with a troubled consciousness of the unusualness of the occasion.

The barn was very bright: Paul had borrowed some lanterns from a neighbor, and added two or three he had found in the loft and all the lamps Jane could bring him from the house. The narrow space in front of the stalls was swept and garnished, and at its farther end were three chairs, each with a bunch of goldenrod tied on the back. The lanterns swung from the rafters, the lamps stood on the tops of the feed-bins, and the three bedroom candles were deposited, at Jane's command, on three upturned buckets in front of what was evidently Paul's end of the open space. When the sisters entered there was a rustle among the pigeons overheard, and the cow stopped rubbing her neck against her stanchion, and looked at them with

mild, wondering eyes; then drew a long, fragrant sigh, and went on chewing her cud.

"This is very strange," said Miss Henrietta.

"It is very exciting," murmured Miss Maggy, nervously.

The gleam of all the lights, the candle-flames bending and flaring in wandering draughts, the gigantic shadows lurking among the rafters, the silence — except for Clover's soft breaths—Paul's impressive absence—were all strange, almost alarming.

As for Miss Jane, she looked around her but said nothing.

"Shall we sit down?" Miss Maggy asked, in a whisper. "Where is he, Janie?"

"He will come in a few moments," said Jane. "Yes, sit down, please!" She spoke authoritively.

She went over to the bin to turn up one of the lamps, and looked, with anxious responsibility, toward the unused stall which Paul had told her was to be his dressing-room. Suppose he didn't do well? She was nervous to have him begin and get through with it.

Suddenly, back in the shadows, Paul began to whistle:

> "I'm dreaming now of Hallie—
> Sweet Hallie, sweet Hallie;"

then he came bounding out, bowed, whirled round on his crutch, and stood still, laughing. Jane caught her breath, her feet and hands grew cold; the other sisters murmured, agitatedly. . . . Paul was clothed in his black tights and scarlet breech-cloth; a small scarlet cap was set sidewise on his head, and his crutch was wound with scarlet ribbons.

"LADIES," HE BEGAN, "I SHALL HAVE THE PLEASURE"

go and leave Jane; it would have been an impropriety. As for Paul, he plunged at once into his performance, with his running commentary of fun and jokes. Always beginning, "Ladies!" Once inadvertently he added, "and gentlemen," but stopped, with some embarrassment, to explain that he got so used to his "patter" that he just ran it off without thinking. His agility and strength and grace were really remarkable, but Jane Jay watched him with hot discomfort; once, when he turned a somersault, as lightly as a thistle seed is blown from its stalk, she looked away. But the rest of the "audience" began to be really interested and a little excited. "Just see that!" Miss Maggy kept saying. "Isn't it wonderful?"

"But if any one should call," Miss Henrietta whispered, "I should swoon

with embarrassment. Still, I am sure it's very creditable. Once, when I was a child, I went to the circus with one of the servants, and saw a man jump that way."

Jane's face was stinging. "I don't like it at all," she said, under her breath. She looked at one of the lamps on the feed-bin until it blurred and made the water stand in her eyes. "Oh, I *wish* he would stop!" she said to herself.

"If," said Paul, "any lady in the audience would care to hold a hat up above my head, I would demonstrate a high kick!"

"I will, Mr. Phillips," Miss Jane said, briefly.

"Oh, Janie!" said Miss Henrietta.

"Oh, my dear, really—" murmured Miss Maggy.

"If you'll stand on this bin, ma'am,"

said Paul, taking off his cap with a sweeping bow.

For just an instant Jane hesitated, which gave Miss Maggy the chance to say, "Oh, Jane, my dear—really, I think—I don't think—"

"I sha'n't mind in the least," said Miss Jane, haughtily; "I—I'll enjoy it."

"Well, wait," Maggy entreated; "if you must do it, let me run back to the house and bring over my old gray skirt. I'm taller than you are, and if you put it on, it will be long enough to hide your feet."

Miss Jane nodded. "I'll come in a moment, Mr. Phillips," she said, in a fluttered voice; and when Miss Maggy, very much out of breath, brought the skirt, she slipped it on, and would have climbed on to the bin; but Paul, springing forward, knelt, and put out his hand. "Step on that," he said;

"up you go!"—and up she went, like a bird, thrilling at the lift of his powerful wrist. She stood there on the bin, the long folds of Miss Maggy's gray skirt hanging in clumsy modesty about her feet, and held out the hat. She was breathless from that springing jump from Paul's hand; but her face was stern and set; in spite of the thrill, she was miserably ashamed. The two other sisters gaped up at her apprehensively, but with undisguised interest. Paul, however, did not share the emotions of the moment; he leaped over three chairs arranged in a pyramid, twirled round on his crutch, and then, with a bound up into the air, lifted the hat out of Jane's nervous hand with his foot. Then he stopped, by force of habit, to wait for applause; but the two ladies before him only said, faintly, "Dear me!"

Jane, gathering up the long skirt in her hands, looked down at him and saw the disappointment in his face; she said nothing; but instantly he kissed his hand to her, and bowed so low that the scarlet cockade on his cap swept the floor; his dark eyes, looking into hers, caught the flare of the candle-light in a sudden flash.

Jane Jay's heart came up in her throat.

That was the end of the show. The three candles of the footlights were burning with a guttering flame; the cow was lying down in her stall; the pigeons had stopped their rustling coo; Paul, out of breath, but very much pleased with the condition of his knee, sat on one of the overturned buckets and fanned himself.

"This is the time you preach, isn't it, Mr. Phillips?" Miss Jane said. It

was as if she were trying to bring him back to his true self.

"When I get through a performance? Yes, ma'am. People are pretty good-natured then, and willing to listen, you know."

He laughed as he spoke. There was always a laugh ready to bubble over when he talked.

"It is a pity," said Miss Henrietta, vaguely, "that Paul's circumstances in life did not permit him to study for the ministry."

"That's so," said Paul; "but my folks couldn't have afforded it when I was growing up, even if I'd had a mind to—which I didn't, till I was converted, and I was twenty-four then."

"It isn't too late yet, is it?" said Maggy, sympathetically. "Perhaps Doctor Lavendar could help you to get a scholarship somewhere. I know he

wrote letters about a scholarship when the Smith's oldest boy wanted to go to college."

Jane's face flushed suddenly. "I never thought of that! Why, Mr. Phillips—why shouldn't you study now?"

Paul had stopped fanning himself, and was listening. "I've heard of scholarships," he said, "but I never had anybody to put me in the way of them."

Miss Jane, in her excited interest, had not noticed that her sisters had risen and were waiting for her. "Come, Janie," they murmured; and Jane came, reluctantly. "You must see Doctor Lavendar to-morrow," she said, as they drew her away. "Oh, I believe you can do it!"

And as the three sisters, with their empty candlesticks in their hands, walked back in the moonlight to their

own door, she said again and again, "Yes, he must be a clergyman—he must!"

Miss Maggy smiled indulgently, and said that she supposed Janie had it in her blood to work for the church. "Great-grandfather Jay was always encouraging young men to enter the ministry," she said, "and Janie inherits it, I suppose." And then Miss Maggy said that she was worried to death because she didn't think the new pink worsted was a good match for the pink they had been using.

When Miss Jane went to her room she was too excited to go to bed; there was a spot of color in her cheeks, and her eyes shone: a clergyman! yes; why not?

It seemed to Miss Jane, because of the beating of her heart and the swelling of her throat, that her hope for

Paul was zeal for the Kingdom of God. How much good he would do if he only were a clergyman; if he had a church, and wore a surplice! He would talk differently then, and not say "ain't"; and he would take dinner with Doctor Lavendar, and go to Mrs. Dale's for tea; and—and Doctor Lavendar was getting old, and by the time Mr. Phillips took orders, perhaps he might have to have an assistant! Imagination, leaping boldly into the future, made her feel a little faint. She sat down and leaned her elbows on the window-sill, and looked out into the misty September night. She could see the black pitch-roof of the stable, where a lamp was still burning. It came to her that perhaps Paul was kneeling there. Something lifted in her like a wave. She felt a strange longing for tears;

she, too, wanted to pray, to cry out for something—she knew not what:—for pardon for her sins, or for death and heaven. Perhaps—perhaps she was being "converted"? Mr. Phillips had used the word often, but she had not understood it until now. She said to herself that she loved her Saviour. "Oh," she said, in a broken, breathless way—"oh, I am a great sinner! But he has converted me." In the exaltation of the moment she did not stop to search the blank white page of her life to find a stain. Through her numb thought, this sword-thrust of emotion had pierced to the very quick. She called it "religion," for her virgin soul knew no other word. She suffered. She began to live.

She covered her face with her hands, and, kneeling down, prayed passionately.

V

PAUL PHILLIPS was to set out on the road the next day; but the hope that had leaped up at Miss Maggy's words made him eager to follow the suggestion of seeing Doctor Lavendar.

Jane Jay, her face pale, but full of some exalted consciousness, went early to the rectory and told the story of Paul and his aspirations. "It is very interesting," Doctor Lavendar said—"very interesting. Of course I'll see him. Jane, my dear, it is wonderful, as you say. The Lord is able to raise up children to Abraham out of—any-

thing! Send him along. Tell him to be here at ten o'clock."

Jane went back to the stable and gave Paul the message. He was kneeling down, packing his few possessions in his knapsack, unwinding the scarlet ribbons from his crutch, and taking the cockade out of his cap. He looked up anxiously. "Does he think—" he began.

"You are to go and see him at ten, Mr. Phillips," she said; "and—you will be a clergyman!" Paul drew a long breath and went on with his packing; but there was a light in his eyes.

"Do you know," he said, "sometimes it seems to me that our disappointments are His appointments? Just drop the *dis*, you know. It makes 'em real pleasant to look at them that way. It was a disappointment to

wrench my knee; there's no use denying it; and yet look what may come out of it! I bet it was His appointment." He gave a smiling upward look of the frankest, most good-humored affection, as though communing with Some One she did not see.

Miss Jane watched him without speaking. She stood leaning against the feed-bin, twisting a bit of straw nervously, looking at him, and then looking away.

"You will be a clergyman," she said again, in a low voice. "But I want you to know now—I want to tell you—"

Paul had risen, and got his crutch under his arm; but there was something in her voice that made him look at her keenly; then, instantly, he turned his eyes away.

"I want you to know—that I—oh—until you came I never thought anything—mattered. I never really cared; though I went to church, and my father was a clergyman, and Great-grandfather Jay was a bishop. But I—I didn't really—" She faltered, trembling very much, her throat swelling again, and her face illumined. "You've made me—religious, I think," she ended, in a whisper.

"I thank the Lord if He's spoken a word through me," the man said, tenderly; but he did not look into her face.

Miss Jane went away hurriedly, running, almost, poor girl, to her own room; there she lay upon her bed, face downward, trembling. She said to herself that she loved her Saviour, that she was converted. She was very happy.

When Paul came limping into the rectory, the old clergyman gave him a steady look; then all his face softened and brightened, and he took his hand in both his own. "Sit down," he said, "and we'll have a pipe. Well, you had an ugly fall, didn't you? How's your knee?"

"Well, the darned thing's all right now," said Paul, with his kindling smile, "but it's been slow enough. I don't know what I would have done if the ladies hadn't been so good to me."

"And you are starting out again now, are you?" said Doctor Lavendar. "Oh, that's my dog, Danny. Danny, give your paw, sir, like a gentleman."

Paul seized the dog by the scruf of the neck and put him on his knee. "Ain't he a fine one?" he said, chuckling. "Look at him licking my finger!

Yes, sir; I'm going on the road again; but Miss Jane Jay, she told me that maybe you could put me in the way of getting an education, so as I could be a preacher."

"But I understand you do preach now?" said Doctor Lavendar.

"Yes, sir; but not properly. I just talk to 'em. Plain man to man. I get at them after I've given a show on the road or in the saloons. But—it's a hard line, sir. I—used to be a drinking man myself," he ended, in a low voice.

The old minister nodded. "You go right into the enemy's country?"

"Yes," Paul said, briefly.

"It gives you a hold on 'em?" Doctor Lavendar suggested.

"That's so," Paul said. "I sometimes think if I hadn't been there myself I wouldn't know how to put it to

them. Still," he said, thoughtfully, "you can't apply that doctrine generally. It would be kind of dangerous. We don't want to sin that grace may abound. Well, it's mixing. You see, that's where I feel the need of an education, sir. That, and people going down to the pit: the pit ain't just according to my ideas of fairness."

"How do you explain those things?" asked the old man.

"Oh, well, I just say to myself, '*He understands His business.*'"

"The Judge of all the earth shall do right!" said Doctor Lavendar. "Tell me some more."

So Paul, stroking Danny's shaggy little head, told him, fully. Doctor Lavendar got up once, and tramped about the room, with his coat tails pulled forward under his arms and his hands in his pockets; once his pipe

went out, and once he took his spectacles off and wiped them.

When the story was finished he came and sat down beside the younger man, and struck him on the knee with a trembling hand. "My dear brother! my dear brother!" he said. "Go back to the roads and the saloons; and prepare the way of the Lord, and make straight His paths!"

Paul put Danny down, gently, and looked up with a puzzled face.

"Sir," said Doctor Lavendar, "the Lord has educated you. You don't need the schooling of men. See what a work has been given you to do: Paul, a minister to the Gentiles!"

"Yes, sir," said Paul, "if I can just get some education. If I can know a few things."

"My dear friend," said the old man, smiling, "you know what is best worth

knowing in the world: *you know your Master.* He's put you to do a work for Him which most of His ministers are not capable of doing. You have a congregation, young man, that we old fellows would give our ears to get. Who would listen to me if I went into Van Horn's and talked to them? Not one! They'd slink out the back door. And I can't get 'em into my church—though I've got the red cushions," said Dr. Lavendar, his eyes twinkling. "No, sir; your work's been marked out for you. Do it!—and may the Lord bless you, and bless the word you speak!" His face moved, and he took off his glasses again, and polished them on his big red silk handkerchief.

Paul's bewildered disappointment was evident in his face. So evident that Doctor Lavendar set himself to

tell him, in patient detail, what he thought of the situation; and as he talked the light came. "I see," the young man said once or twice, softly, as though to himself; "I see—I see." It came to him, as it comes to most of us, if we live long enough, that when we ask for a stone, He sometimes gives us bread, and that the path of service is the path in which we find our feet set.

But when he rose to go, there was a solemn moment of silence. Then the old minister, with his hands uplifted above the young minister's head, said:

"*Almighty God, who hath given you this will to do all these things, grant also unto you strength and power to perform the same, that He may accomplish His work which He hath begun in you, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*"

Paul, leaning on his crutch, covered his face with his hands, and said, passionately, "*Amen.*"

When he went back to the three ladies, the uplifting of that moment lingered in his eyes. He came into the sitting-room, where Miss Henrietta and Miss Maggy were at work; it was a cool September day, and a little fire crackled in the grate. The room was hot, and smelled of worsted; Miss Henrietta's canary hung in the sunny window, cracking his hemp seeds, and ruffling his feathers after a splashing bath. The two ladies were rocking and knitting, and Miss Henrietta had been saying how much she missed rolling her big pink ball along the floor for Jacky to play with. "Though he didn't play much," she said; "he was getting old."

"I used to think he was lazy," observed Miss Maggy, comfortably.

"No, he wasn't," Miss Henrietta retorted. "You never appreciated Jacky."

"Yes, I did," Maggy remonstrated; "only I never called him human."

"Human? Well, I think that some cats are nicer than most people," old Henrietta replied, with heat.

It was just then that Paul came in to report the result of his interview with Doctor Lavendar. He was very brief about it, and as he talked the solemn look faded, and he spoke with open cheerfulness, though with reserve. "I guess he's right," he said; "the place for me is the place where I'm put; I guess he's right. I've got my job! Well, ladies, I came to say good-bye, and to thank you, and—"

"Do you mean," said Jane, from

the doorway behind him, "that Doctor Lavendar won't help you to be a clergyman?" Her face was pale, and then flooded with crimson; she was trembling very much. "It is wicked!" Her voice was suddenly shrill, but broke almost into a sob. "I don't like Doctor Lavendar! You ought to be a clergyman."

Paul held up his hand with a certain authority. "I have been called to do my own work," he said.

"I guess Doctor Lavendar's right, Janie," Miss Maggy said, soothingly. "Paul, I'm going to give you one of Bishop Jay's sermons. I've copied it out, and I'm sure you will make good use of it."

Then she asked some friendly questions about his route, and brought him the sermon and a little luncheon she had prepared; and then Paul began

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to make his adieux. He said much of their kindness to him, and his wish that he could ever have the chance to do anything for them; while they politely deprecated anything that they had done.

Miss Henrietta shook hands with him, and said that if he should meet a white cat anywhere, to be sure and see if he answered to the name of Jacky. Miss Maggy bade him be very careful of his limb, and hoped he would find his sister better. "And if you ever get so far east again, you must come and see us," she said, kindly.

Jane gave him her hand; but she let it slip listlessly from his fingers, and she did not lift her eyes to meet his —a brother's eyes, pitying and understanding. "Good-bye," she said, dully.

Paul, shouldering his knapsack,

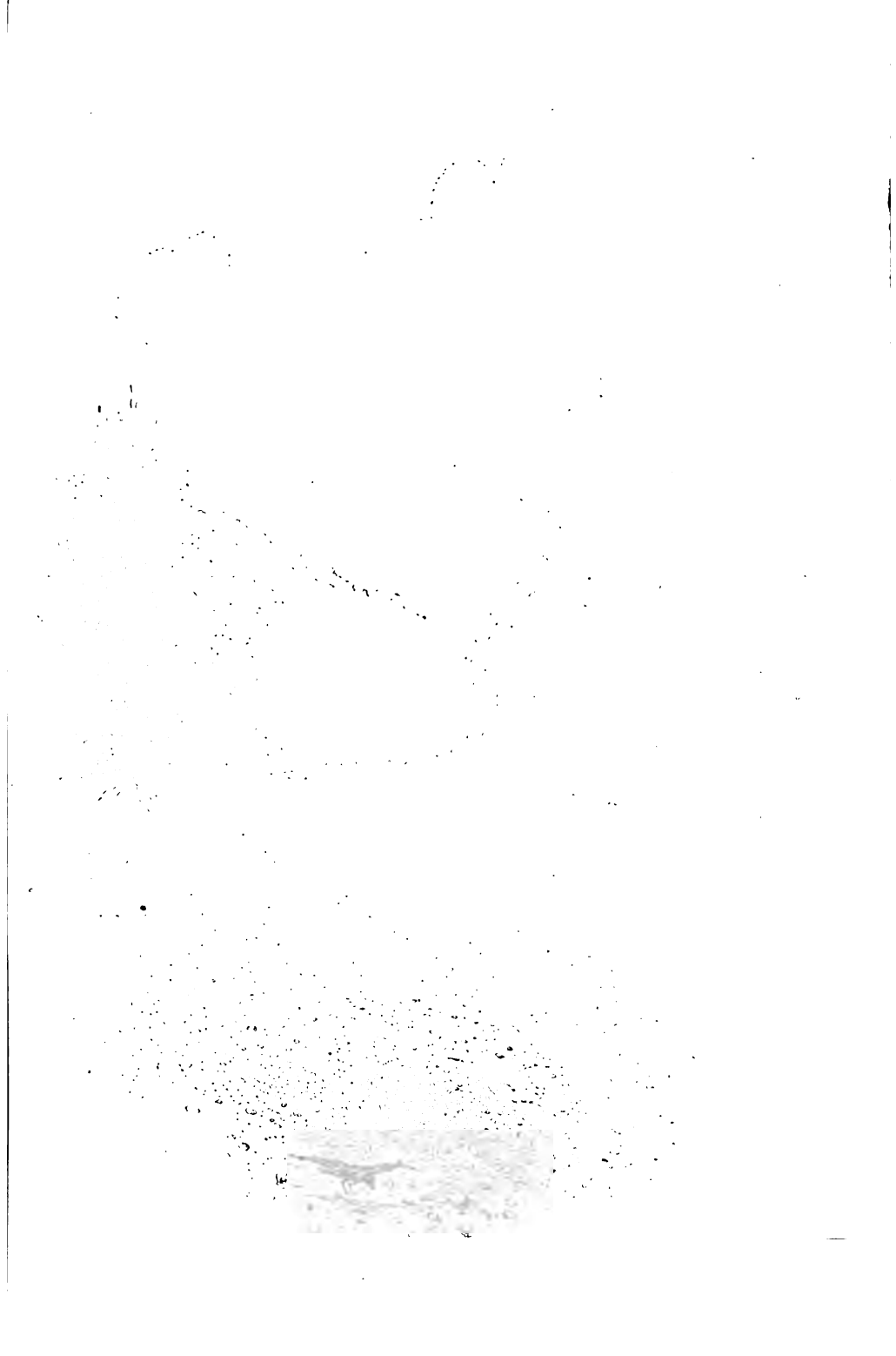
waved his hat gayly and started off, limping down the path to the street. . . .

"Well, now really, for a person in his position," said Miss Maggy, "he has behaved very well, hasn't he?"

"Yes, indeed," old Henrietta agreed; "and he was so sympathetic, too. See, Maggy, this needle does make a looser stitch—don't you think so?"

Jane leaned her forehead against the window and looked down the road where, for a moment, there was a little cloud of dust; then it disappeared.

THE END



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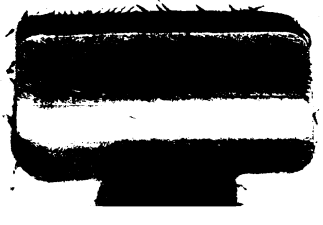
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